



On the marine shoreline around Vashon Island, nearshore environmental conditions would be evaluated for potential impacts prior to approval of new docks or piers.

King County's existing shoreline program requires a property owner to explore other options for access to the water, such as sharing a neighbor's existing dock, using a nearby boat launch or marina, or installing a moorage buoy before constructing a new residential dock or pier. This requirement would continue to apply. The proposal would require a shoreline Conditional Use Permit to construct a new dock or pier in the Natural and Forestry environments.

Overview of Docks and Piers

Proposed Changes for New Residential Docks and Piers

King County's existing shoreline regulations allow construction of new docks and piers for the private non-commercial use of owners of single family residences, with an exemption from a Shoreline Substantial Development Permit. However, in order to grant a shoreline exemption for a dock or pier, a proposal must be in compliance with other King County regulations, including the Critical Areas Code.

The Critical Areas Code (KCC 21A.24.045.D9, 10, and 11) allows construction of a seasonal floating dock or pier within wetlands and aquatic areas subject to certain limitations, including that the structure is seasonal; there is no significant vegetation or salmonid spawning where the dock or pier is proposed; no toxic materials or hazardous substances are used; and the lake shoreline has specific minimum existing and zoned density. Very few of the rural lakes in King County can meet the specific density requirements. This result has been to effectively prohibit new docks and piers along most rural lakes in King County.

King County is proposing to modify its shoreline regulations and Critical Area regulations to allow new rural residential docks and piers where appropriate. The County's proposed changes would protect the most environmentally sensitive habitats along a shoreline, while allowing construction of docks and piers in those shoreline areas that have been legally altered in the past and provide less significant habitat. The proposed changes would allow fixed docks or piers along lake shorelines, except for those shorelines with significant wetland vegetation. The existing or zoned density around a lake would no longer be a criterion for allowing docks and piers.

How Docks & Piers Affect Shoreline Areas

Reduce fish food sources. During the freshwater stage of their life cycle, salmon eat mainly very small invertebrate animals that depend on natural shoreline habitats for food and shelter. Removing vegetation from the shoreline means removing potential meals for fish.

Reduce places for small fish refuge. Small fish such as young salmon rely on a complex structure of submerged tree branches, rootwads and other forms of natural cover to hide from predators. Docks and piers are relatively simple structural elements providing very little protection. This difference is critical for the survival of small fish. Scientists have determined that docks and piers provide the ideal shade and overhead cover for ambush predators.



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DOCKS AND PIERS

Blocks Light. The key to maintaining a healthy ecosystem is balance. A modest amount of shading from vegetation at the water's edge is ideal, but structures that extend well out into the water with extended areas of blocked light cause problems. Eelgrass is an important marine plant in the ecosystem, forming aquatic meadows that provide food and habitat for many species including salmon, crab and herring. Several studies have shown that eelgrass declines or dies when sunlight is blocked. The combined effect of the many docks, piers, moored boats and various other hard structures all add up to significantly impact our shoreline areas.

Typically increase boat traffic and sediment erosion in an area.

Add detrimental chemicals to the water. Docks and piers are typically treated with wood preservatives and cleaned with household and industrial cleaners.